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radiohead

What's all this then? The same band appearing on the front cover of Curfew twice? Surely that's not on.

OK, so these same five young men have graced the front page before (a year ago last December to be precise) but back in them days they were called On a Friday not Radiohead. It's a pretty tenuous excuse I know but you'll have to live with it.

And anyway, this isn't the real reason why the band have made a return to that hallowed position. Oh no. The reason why Radiohead have got their second airing is because in those last fourteen months they have achieved as much, if not more, than most local bands could ever hope to achieve.

In December 1991 On a Friday were pretty hot property; they had just about every A&R department in the country lapping at their heels and they had a small sackful of smart tunes with which to tempt them. Since then they've signed to EMI (via Parlaphone), toured themselves stupid, released a genuine CLASSIC single and found themselves raved about to the Nth degree in every national music paper on the market. 'Creep' (their second single) was voted fourth best record of the year by the NME writers and their readers voted the band in the top ten most promising new acts of the year. So far in 1993 they've had a single of the week in the Melody Maker for 'Anyone can play guitar', gained one of the most stunningly over the top live reviews that I've ever read in that same organ and had more plays on Mark Goodier's evening session on Radio 1 than you could shake a stick at. The single, released on the 1st of this month, looks likely to catapult them into the top 40 for the first time.

In short Radiohead are not only happening; they've bloody happened mate.

So how have Thom (vocals, guitar); Ed (guitar); John (guitar); Colin (bass) and Phil (drums) spent their last year?

'Snorting coke and learning to jack up.'

'We've played a hell of a lot of gigs. We played over a hundred last year, mainly supports, hardly any headlines.'

'We've supported The Frank and Walters, Sultans of Ping FC, Catherine Wheel, Kingmaker, EMF, Midway Still, A House...'

'Anyone who'd have us basically.'

And which were the best and worst of those?

'Best was definitely Frank and Walters. The worst was Kingmaker.

'Not because they were horrible or anything, it's just that we never got a soundcheck because they had such a terrible production. They were really nice blokes. Loz is a very sensitive person. He's in the wrong business.'

Were you pleased that both Kingmaker and the Franks voted you as their favourite new bands for the year?

'Yeah, all that crawling must have paid off.'

'I think it was more a case of they were so busy touring that they never got to see any other bands.'

You must have been surprised at the reaction you've received from the press, particularly to 'Creep'?

'It's strange because the first EP, 'Drill' got more radio play than 'Creep' so we thought it was doing badly. It was a real shock to see it get fourth best single of the year and find that it had sold 12,000 copies. The Radio 1 producers thought it was too miserable to play.'

'It didn't really dawn on us until December how we were doing but the audience reaction to 'Creep' on the Franks tour was incredible. What is strange is that we were the only band to get in the best new bands poll who hadn't had a front cover in one of the national papers.'

You aren't worried that all this adulation at such an early stage might be a bad thing?

'Well, we were completely ignored for a whole year before we started getting reviews. We're not a Suede. We don't have that kind of angle for the press to grab onto. People have to really dig to get an angle on us.'

Ah yes. The 'angle'. Every piece of press about the band seems to concentrate on Thom as some kind of tortured soul exorcising his personal demons in public, contrasting with John who is painted as some kind of mad axeman.'

'I don't mind it really.'

Are you a tortured soul?

'Not really, maybe, I don't know. It's just something for them to write about isn't it? And when you come out and write a single like 'Creep' it's bound to attract that sort of thing.'

'The new single's much happier. This is going to be our happy year.'

Listening to the new single, and in particular its two b-sides 'Coke babies' and 'Faithless the wonder boy' Radiohead seem to have reached an even higher peak of intensity than on their two previous singles. The songs are, overall, sharper and stronger and the whole EP is much more cohesive. 'Drill' was good but lacked a stand out track. 'Creep' was an excellent single but its three extra tracks were near enough a waste of time. The production on the new record is huge. I think epic is not an inappropriate word to use.

'The two b-sides are very new songs which we wrote on tour. We wanted to put something fresh on the record, just to satisfy ourselves really. 'Anyone can play guitar' has been around since last summer.'

'The last EP was like two different bands. This is more focused. More like what we want to do.'

Radiohead's debut LP will follow the single on the 22nd of February and looks certain to secure their place at the pinnacle of new British pop but already they're restless enough to be demoing new songs for a follow-up album. With all that touring I wonder where they find the time to write new material.

'Because when you are on tour there's nothing you want more than to go into the studio and record new songs. Some bands take a few weeks off when they finish touring but we go straight into Coldroom and start rehearsing, it keeps up the momentum that you'd otherwise lose. Our next tour is going to be much more intensive because if you have too much time off it backfires and you lose your energy.'

Isn't it exhausting working so intensely?

'It's less exhausting than a 9 to 5 job. It's only tiring if you're getting off your head every night which tended to happen on the 'Drill' tour and I made myself ill. If you look after yourself it's not exhausting at all.'

'Everything's more focused on tour, you can make decisions quicker. Also we haven't really achieved that much yet. There's still a lot of hard work to do. We're always thinking about the next stage. We're on a roll now but we haven't let it go to our heads. As we said last time we're very ambitious but it takes work.'

Thus far Radiohead have received only one bad review which appeared in the last NME of last year. It described them as 'a lily livered excuse for a rock band'. Isn't bad press as valid as good in some ways?

'It is if it's done properly. Not if it's malicious or just the journalist getting on an ego trip. Writers are paid to have an opinion but when that opinion gets bigger than the music is when the problems begin.'

JERICHO TAVERN

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Thom explains that after that particular review he went out and bought a large box of plasters and stuck them all over his flat because the review 'cut really deeply'. Everyone thinks Thom's gone a bit strange all of a sudden.

If the band's music has received almost universal praise their decision to sign for nasty old multinational, baby-eating monster corporation EMI rather than good old Garden Shed Records hasn't.

'We had to live with that decision all of last year. One NME journalist even told us that had 'Creep' been released on an indie label it would have been massive. That says it all really. It's other people's problem. There have been times when we've thought maybe we should have done the obvious thing and set up an indie label through EMI and got distribution through Pinnacle or someone.'

'But we're NOT an indie band. We write pop songs but some people can't see that.'

Don't you have problems with EMI trying to force you to do certain things, to write hit singles and be something you're not?

'We haven't had any problems with them except about radio play but that's just a small part of the company. They're really good. They let us do things how we want to do them, even down to when the LP is due to be released. They keep asking us what we want to do. We want to take things slowly, stay out of the limelight, tour lots and build up a following. Like 'Creep' took quite a few months to sell out as more people saw us.'

As you achieve more success is there not a risk of some people's jealousy spilling over? Accusations of selling out, particularly as you're on EMI, are almost inevitable.

'That sort of thing is such a British problem. The British hate success. We haven't sold out. Selling out is what Lulu's doing now, making dance records.'

So any plans to go further afield?

'We're off to America in April, they don't have a problem with success over there.'

'Success can make people very ugly though and it's important to keep your ego in check but then some of the worst egos are in dead end bands playing to ten people in pubs. Doing the whole Jim Morrison bit to eight people and a dog.'

'Apparently the record's been selling in places like Germany and Sweden and Israel. All the places with high suicide rates. We want to wait until we've got a demand for us before we go touring properly abroad.'

Having been away a lot how do you now view the local music scene?

'Music in Oxford is just as good as in any other city but it just depends on whether bands get the luck in getting a deal.'

'Bands seem to be better now than they were a year ago and it seems to be less competitive. Bands like The Daisies have come on a lot musically. It's sad that audiences are down.'

'The Bigger the God are the best band in Oxford. They need a break, they must be getting really frustrated. David is a brilliant vocalist. Their time will come. It's good to see the Crimpers' name all round the country, in fanzines and things.'

'That Jericho Tavern party was great. There's not many towns could have something like that.'

'And we were the worst band on the bill.'

No ego problems with this band then. Radiohead have achieved a lot but they're not stopping now. Nothing short of world domination will do. The difference between them and so many other hopefuls though is that for Radiohead such a goal is not some impossible pipe dream. They have the songs, they have the sound and they have the attitude to go all the way. Buy the new single and hear for yourself. Better still see them at the Oxford Venue on the 20th of this month. It'll be a sellout so get your ticket now.

Are Radiohead rich yet?

'Definitely not.'

Will they be?

'Oh yes.'

And so off they go. To conquer the world. First stop Dudley. Well, we've all got to start somewhere.